

H. Bee
AN *112c*
INVESTIGATION
OF
THE ESSENCE
OF THE
DEITY; *400. ad*
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WITH
A WORD OR TWO
BY WAY OF
POSTSCRIPT,
TO THE
PROFESSORS OF DEISM,
IN
REFUTATION OF THEIR DOCTRINE,
THAT
The Bible is not the word of God.

By SCEPTICUS BRITANNICUS.

Barclay or Baxter, wherefore do we blame,
For innovations, yet approve the same
In Wickliffe and in Luther?—Why are these
Call'd wise Reformers, those mad S. Staries?
'Tis most unjust, men always had a right,
And ever will, to think, to speak, to write
Their various minds.—

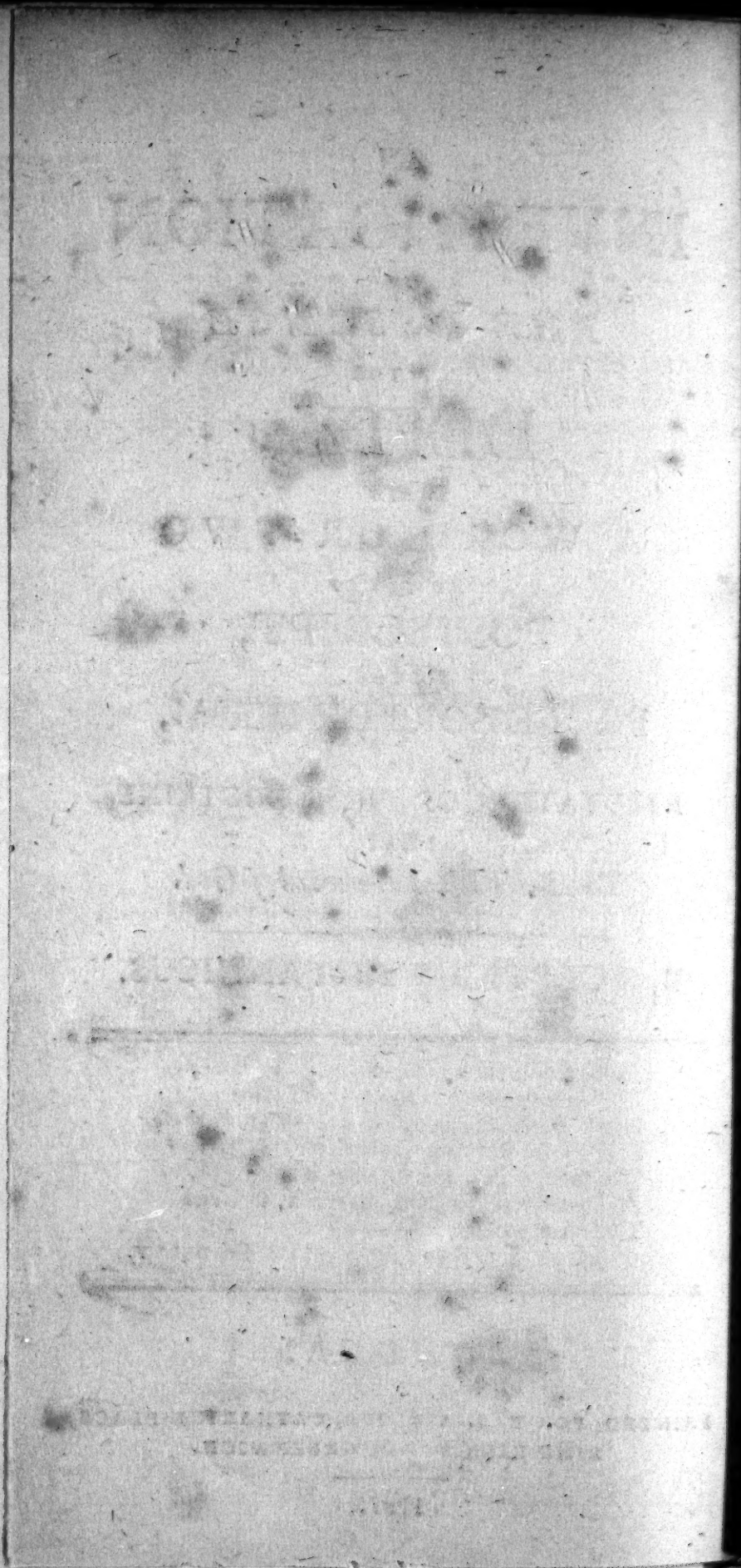
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DEDICATION.

TO the Admirers of Truth,
whether gorgeously arrayed in Pur-
ple and fine Linen, or, so meanly
and sparingly clad as to be barely
efficient to protect them from the
clemency of the Seasons.---

The following INVESTIGATION
with all due Submission dedicated

THE AUTHOR.

DEDICATION

To the Admirers of Truth,
and the friends of Liberty,
who are so warmly
disposed to protect them from the
tyranny of the passions.

The following INVESTIGATION
into the nature and extent of the

THE AUTHOR.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE author of the following pages anticipates the odium which they are liable to sustain, not only on account of the apparent novelty of the system attempted to be developed; but by reason of the principles inculcated, being contrary to the generally received opinions of the greater part of his countrymen.

But if his endeavours to throw a light upon, and collect into a focus, a subject, which has been already sufficiently established, by the solemn fiat of men, whose abilities reflect honor upon the times in which they lived, shall be approved, his exertions will be amply rewarded:—His only request is, for an impartial reading, and that, whatever shall appear to be wrong, may meet with the censure which erroneous principles merit; being fully persuaded, that a generous and enlightened public will not withhold approbation from that, which it shall be convinced is praise-worthy.

DEDICA-

ALVINE TISEMENT.

The author of the following paper
has the honor to acknowledge the
kindness of the printer, who has
been so good as to print the
same in the most elegant manner
possible, and to send him a copy
of the same, which he has the
pleasure to send to the public.
The author is much obliged to
the printer for his kind
attention, and for the
care he has taken in
printing the same.

PHILADELPHIA.

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AN INVESTIGATION, &c.

CHAP. I.

THE saying that the truth should not be spoken at all times, has a direct tendency to evil; it is the first step towards initiating the human mind in vicious principles. By adhering to this precept, we infallibly break through the barrier which divides virtue and vice, and subject man, continually, to those specious allurements, which seldom fail of ending injuriously to him.

Those establishments, whether civil or religious, whose basis is founded in reason, and the expressed approbation of the people, could not possibly ever have had occasion to forbid the speaking of truth; it could only have originated with superstition, fraud, arbitrary power, or some such *frivolous* inventions which will not bear scrutinizing. In fact, truth loses none of its beauties by being investigated; the more we examine it, the more we shall be convinced of its authenticity, and the greater will be our admiration of it. Falsehood is in a continual dread of being brought to the test, lest a discovery of the methods it takes to impose on the human understanding, should be detected.

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To interdict, under severe penalties, the researches after truth, is the peculiar aim of every arbitrary and despotic government.

By disseminating principles, whether equitable or otherwise, man sustains no real injury; 'tis the application of erroneous principles to practice which is alone unjustifiable.

What offence would it be, against the laws of society, to endeavour to prove that those immensely distant orbs of light, the stars, are either inhabited or uninhabited? but, undoubtedly, were it the interest of any description or class of men that the public should hold a contrary opinion they would take every method their imagination could devise to effectuate it: if they should fail and the legislature countenanced them, they would as a dernier resort, most probably, have recourse to the argument of force, in order to refute that which the force of argument was incapable of.

To inflict punishments on men, for a free delivery of their opinions, instead of acting as a refutation, generally tends the more effectually to root them in their minds; and to an impartial observer, will be, at least, a negative proof of the incontrovertibility of such opinions.

The revenge of secretly maintaining those sentiments for which they may have been persecuted with most men, operates as a recompense for the injuries sustained on account of having promulgated them.

Persecution for opinion, is absolutely irreconcilable with any religion of which charity is introduced as a leading feature.

Man cannot think otherwise than he does; he only judges of objects as they present themselves to his imagination; his thoughts being the effect of his particular organization, are no more under his subjection than his respiration. It is, therefore, highly unreasonable he should be punished for doing that which he cannot possibly avoid, and which probably he may think is for the benefit of mankind.

The publication of opinions, like the rapid torrents of rivers, is only to be checked for a season; they afterwards return in their accustomed channels with a redoubled force. Neither the *despotism* of *Germany*, nor the *superstition* of *Italy*, hath been, or will be, able to withstand the *progress* of *opinion*. A spirit of free enquiry has manifested itself, and it is not in the power of all the coalesced tyrants of the world to say, thus far shalt thou go and no farther. Its effects have been felt where least suspected. Even the throne of the mighty Ottoman emperor has been shaken by it. *Reason, on high, has displayed her standard, and however tyranny and superstition may confederate, the genial influence of her benign government must sooner or later be spread throughout the universe.*

Man, when once fully convinced of his error, if the least spark of honesty or virtue resides in his breast, will be obliged to acknowledge the impropriety of his former conduct.

Reasoning, by precedent, subjects us to error continually; for until we are perfectly acquainted with the secret motives which induced our predecessors to adopt such measures, we ought not to look up to them as infallible. Perhaps the spur
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